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From local philanthropy to political humanitarianism: South Asian and Egyptian humanitarian aid during the period of decolonisation

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Abstract

This working paper focuses on the provision of Egyptian and South Asian humanitarian aid during decolonisation that saw the emergence of India and Egypt as independent nation-states in the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹ The authors aim to show the continuities and shifts in the relief efforts of the Egyptian Red Crescent and of the Hindu Mahasabha by examining their ideas of giving and the practises they followed during the (late) colonial and the postcolonial periods.

The paper starts with a short overview of the burgeoning field of humanitarian history. Our emphasis, hereby, is on the current lack of non-western perspectives on humanitarianism and its relationship with colonialism and decolonisation. Following this, the paper delineates local charitable and philanthropic traditions in Egypt and South Asia that influenced the Egyptian Red Crescent and the Hindu Mahasabha respectively. Finally, we analyse the work of these organisations in humanitarian crises during the period of decolonisation, paying special heed to their potential politicisation and their relationships with the postcolonial governments.

The paper stresses the importance of taking into account the local and regional social and political contexts in order to understand seriously multiple forms of humanitarianism. We argue that in the wake of decolonisation, both organisations con-

tinued their existing practises of relief provisions, but also had to adapt to new circumstances. Thus, they had to negotiate their relations and status not only with the newly established postcolonial governments, but also other (international) humanitarian organisations and actors.

The historiography of humanitarian aid with a focus on colonialism and decolonisation

The interest in the history of humanitarian aid has rapidly increased in the last decade. Although most studies assume that this phenomenon was not limited to the western world, but that one could encounter humanitarian practises in all world regions at all times, they also argue that humanitarianism is a phenomenon of European or western origin. In doing so, they do not necessarily take into account the non-western forms of humanitarianism that already existed parallel to those developed in the west.² This is also true for studies conducted in the period of decolonisation, where most of the focus is on western humanitarian initiatives and their contribution to the new world order,³

¹ A first version of this paper was presented at the ZMO colloquium on 15 December 2016. During the colonial period British India comprised of regions that constituted two (and later three) postcolonial nation-states, i. e. India, Pakistan (and Bangladesh). Hence, the paper will use »South Asia« and »South Asian« instead of »India« and »Indian« to describe historical developments in the colonial period.

² See among others Michael Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 15–16; Bruce Mazlish, *The Idea of Humanity in a Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 66–67; Johannes Paulmann, »Conjunctures in the History of International Humanitarian Aid During the Twentieth Century«, *Humanity Summer* (2013), 217 and 227.

³ See Fabian Klose, *Human Rights in the Shadow of Colonial violence: The Wars of Independence in Kenya and Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2013); Heike Wieters, *The NGO CARE and Food Aid from America, 1945–80: »Showered with Kindness«?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Johannes Paulmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), section 3; Andrew Thompson, »Humanitarian Principles Put to the Test: Challenges to

while research on the humanitarian aid that originated from (newly) postcolonial actors and organisations is still limited.⁴ Even though the »rise of non-state humanitarianism as a global norm«⁵ is recognised by scholars, the critique articulated by Didier Fassin and others⁶ that humanitarian reason governs precarious lives, often argues only from a western point of view. Missing so far is extensive research on the humanitarian work of non-western organisations that traces parallel, intertwined, and independent developments in the colonial and postcolonial period. Here, we suggest addressing three aspects that would modify and expand our understanding of humanitarianism. The first aspect is the formation of western humanitarianism and how it was deeply influenced by its relations with the non-western, colonial world.⁷ While this insight has been analysed and later on acknowledged by several newer studies, questions dealing with the links between non-western forms of charity and the development of humanitarianism in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, still

attract less attention.⁸ Finally, current research on transnational networks of humanitarian aid has shown that these networks did not consist of unilateral flows from the west to the rest, but of multidirectional links, which remained within, or transcended, national, imperial, and continental borders.⁹ However, published literature on the history of humanitarianism often continues to ignore these findings. Thus, we do hope that the growing body of literature on western humanitarian initiatives will be broadened by more research projects focusing on non-western organisations and initiatives.¹⁰ This will not only produce more insight into

Humanitarian Action during Decolonization», *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 897/898 (2016), 45–76.

4 See for instance: Young-Sun Hong, »The Algerian War, Third World Internationalism, and the Cold War Politics of Humanitarian Assistance«, in *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Johannes Paulmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 289–309; Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care and Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Piero Gleijeses, »Cuba's First Venture in Africa: Algeria 1961–1965«, *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no. 1 (1996), 159–195; Paul Amar, »Global South to the Rescue: Emerging Humanitarian Superpowers and Globalizing Rescue Industries«, *Globalizations* 9/1 (2012), 1–13; Esther Möller, »The Suez Crisis as a Transnational Humanitarian Moment«, *European Review of History* 23/1–2 (2016), 136–153.

5 Kevin O'Sullivan, Matthew Hilton and Juliano Fiori, »Humanitarianisms in context«, *European Review of History* 23, no. 1–2 (2016), 2.

6 Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

See a critical engagement with Fassin's work by Seyla Benhabib in: Seyla Benhabib, »Critique of Humanitarian Reason«, *Eurozine* 2014 (www.eurozine.com/critique-of-humanitarian-reason, last access 07.06.2018).

7 Rob Skinner and Alan Lester, »Humanitarianism and Empire: New Research Agendas«, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 5 (2012), 729–747; Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines Across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Albert Wirz, »Die humanitäre Schweiz im Spannungsfeld zwischen Philanthropie und Kolonialismus. Gustave Moynier, Afrika und das IKRK«, *Traverse: Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 5, no. 2 (1998), 95–111; James P. Daughton, »Behind the Imperial Curtain: International Humanitarian Efforts and the Critique of French colonialism in the Interwar Years«, *French Historical Studies* 34, no. 3 (2011), 503–528; Johannes Paulmann, »Humanitarianism and Empire«, in *The Encyclopaedia of Empire*, vol. 2, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 1112–1123.

8 Jonathan Benthall and Jérôme Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Jonathan Benthall, »Relief«, in *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, ed. Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 890–891. Different studies focusing on South Asian charitable practises during British colonial rule have referred to the development of philanthropic traditions into modern forms of humanitarian work, i.e. in education, and during famines and epidemics. For a detailed discussion, see the next subsection. The same can be said for the Arab World: research has for a long time considered charity and philanthropy as an important socio-political factor; see for example, *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*, ed. Michael David Bonner, Mine Ener and Amy Singer (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003). Only recently have the links of Islam with the concept of humanitarianism attracted more attention. See for example Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria*; Keith Watenpaugh, *From Bread to Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Nora Derbal, »Domestic, Religious, Civic?: Notes on Institutionalized Charity in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia«, in *Gulf Charities Today: Arab Islamic Philanthropy in the »Age of Terror« and Beyond*, ed. Jonathan Benthall and Robert Lacey (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2014), 145–167. For a discussion of the ambivalent relationship between humanitarianism and jihad see Abdel-Rahman Ghandour, *Le jihad islamique: Enquête sur les ONG islamiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002).

9 Christine Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Christina Twomey and Andrew J. May, »Australian Responses to the Indian Famine, 1876–78: Sympathy, Photography and the British Empire«, *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 2 (2012), 233–252; Caroline Reeves, »From Red Crosses to Golden Arches: China, the Red Cross, and the Hague Peace Conference, 1899–1900«, in *Interactions: Transregional Perspectives on World History*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Anand A. Yang (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 63–93; Frank Käser, »A Civilized Nation: Japan and the Red Cross 1877–1900«, *European Review of History* 23, no. 1–2 (2016), 16–32; Yoshiya Makita, »The Alchemy of Humanitarianism: The First World War, the Japanese Red Cross and the Creation of an International Health Order«, *First World War Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014), 117–129; Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria*, 120; Mark Frost, »Humanitarianism and the Overseas Aid Craze in Britain's Colonial Straits Settlements, 1870–1920«, *Past & Present* 236, no. 1 (2017), 169–205; Zuhail Özyaydin, »The Egyptian Red Crescent Society's Aid to the Ottoman State During the Balkan War in 1912«, *Journal of the International Society for the History of Islamic Medicine* (JISHIM) 1 (2003), 18–21.

10 Alexandra Pfeiff, »The Red Swastika Society's Humanitarian Work: A Re-interpretation of the Red Cross in China«,

these organisations themselves in relation to other humanitarian actors, but will also contribute to an extended and more complex reading of humanitarianism in general.

Local charitable and philanthropic traditions and the emergence of humanitarianism

Egypt

The Egyptian Red Crescent arose in a dense field of philanthropic associations of different religious and cultural denominations. Many of them were Muslim, based on *zakāt* (obligatory almsgiving) and *ṣadaqa* (voluntary almsgiving).¹¹ Since the foundation of Islam, discourses and practises of giving have been part of the tradition and resulted in different institutions such as the religious endowments (*awqāf*, singular *waqf*), which were juridical testimonies that often included charitable aspects, e.g. giving food to needy persons.¹² The arrival of European missionaries and colonial enterprises in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt throughout the 19th century, further reinforced Muslim philanthropic engagement as a response to, and critique of, forced conversion and colonisation.¹³ Yet, many missionaries also provided social and medical help to the local population.¹⁴ A lacking welfare system by the colonial state pushed for private Muslim initiatives too, as well as those of local Christian and Jewish origin.¹⁵ In the 1860s and 1870s therefore,

many »modern« Muslim philanthropic associations emerged within the different regions of the Eastern Mediterranean. Nevertheless, recent research has revealed that there did also exist a close relationship between different religious forms of charity. As Beth Baron has shown for example, Christian missionaries, and the Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1928, copied one another's philanthropic discourses and practises.¹⁶

Before the Egyptian Red Crescent was founded in 1912, there had been another Red Crescent founding in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Red Crescent was established in 1869, but mainly as the result of an initiative by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva.¹⁷ Throughout the Turko-Russian War of 1877/1878, the Sultan asked the Swiss government, as the guarantor of the Geneva Conventions, to change the symbol of its aid organisation from a Red Cross to a Red Crescent.¹⁸ Although it was only in 1929 that the Red Crescent was officially accepted as an emblem of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement next to the Red Cross, societies in the Muslim world had already been using it. This was also the case of the Egyptian Red Crescent, founded in 1912 at the initiative of Shaykh 'Alī Yussif, an Egyptian newspaper editor with a pronounced anti-colonial and pan-Islamic view¹⁹, who was therefore highly suspected by the British authorities.²⁰ Because he died one year after the organisation's establishment, his influence remained limited. In the years that followed, Prince Muḥammad 'Alī presided the Egyptian Red Crescent.²¹ The rationale for the founding of the Red Crescent was to support the Ottoman Army and the »Muslim Brothers« in their fight against Italy during the Italo-Turkish War of 1911/1912²² and in the Balkan Wars of 1912/1913.²³ Interestingly,

New Global Studies 10, no. 3 (2016), 373–392; Semih Çelik, »Between History of Humanitarianism and Humanitarianization of History: A Discussion on Ottoman Help for the Victims of the Great Irish Famine, 1845–1852«, *Werkstatt-Geschichte* 68 (2015), 13–27.

11 Michael David Bonner, Mine Ener and Amy Singer, »Introduction«, in *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*, ed. Michael David Bonner, Mine Ener and Amy Singer (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 1.

12 Franz Kogelman, »Kinder unseres Viertels: Das Stiftungswesen in Ägypten«, in *Stiftungen zwischen Politik und Wirtschaft: Geschichte und Gegenwart im Dialog*, ed. Sitta von Reden (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 51–71. For a comparative perspective see: Randi Deguilhem, »Colonial States Claiming Waqf: Reflections on a Transregional Approach, from the French and British Near East to British India«, in *Comparative Study of the Waqf from the East: Dynamism of Norm and Practices in Religious and Familial Donations*, ed. Toru Miura (Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 2019), 217–233.

13 See for example: Umar Ryad, »A Muslim Response to Missionary Activities in Egypt: With a Special Reference to the Al-Azhar High Corps of 'Ulamā' (1925–1935)«, in: *New Faith in Ancient Lands: Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Heleen Murre-van den Berg (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 281–307.

14 Samir Boulos, »A Clean Heart Like Clean Clothes: Cleanliness Customs and Conversion in Egypt (1900–1950)«, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, no. 4 (2010), 315–330; Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008).

15 Mine Ener, *Managing Egypt's Poor and the Politics of Benevolence, 1800–1952* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 100–105.

16 Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

17 Derya Uregen, *Le Croissant-Rouge, outil de modernisation ou reflet d'un empire à la dérive? Des débuts difficiles aux guerres balkaniques 1868–1913* (unpublished Master Thesis, Université de Fribourg, 2010), 33.

18 Ibid., 50.

19 Abbas Kelidar, »Shaykh 'Alī Yusuf: Egyptian Journalist and Islamic Nationalist«, in *Intellectual Life in the Arab East, 1860–1939*, ed. Marwan R. Buheiry (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1981), 10–20.

20 The National Archives/Kew Gardens (TNA), FO 371/1111, 13807, p. 565: »Translation of an Article Entitled 'The Coptic Congress and Coptic Claims' by Sheikh 'Alī Youssef«.

21 Count Patrice de Zogheb, *Red Cross and Red Crescent Work in Alexandria* (Alexandria: Pan-African Anglo-Hellenic Editions, 1943), 1.

22 Anna Baldinetti, »La mezzaluna rossa d'Egitto e la guerra italo-turca«, *Africa* 46, no. 4 (1991), 565–572.

23 See for example Aīām miṣriyya (ed.), *Jam'iyyat al-hilāl al-aḥmar al-maṣry. Sanūāt al-tā'sis* (The society of the Egyptian Red Crescent. The founding years), Cairo: 2008, 65.

Muslim solidarity also transcended the Ottoman Empire, as is found in the case, for instance, of the Indian medical delegations that also went to the Balkan to provide humanitarian support.²⁴

Since Egypt was still part of the Ottoman Empire in 1912, the ICRC did not accept the Egyptian Red Crescent as independent organisation, but suggested that it could become a sub-branch of the Ottoman Red Crescent.²⁵ Due to its own internal regulations, the ICRC did not recognise the Egyptian Red Crescent until 1923, when Egypt was unilaterally declared independent by Great Britain.²⁶ In the following years, the Egyptian organisation society developed into a more secular organisation. Its members were mainly Egyptian Muslims, but also included a few Europeans, such as the Jewish Belgian sugar producer Henri Naus.²⁷ They all belonged to the socio-economic elite of Egypt who had good relationship to the government and to the monarchy. For instance, members of the royal family held honorary positions within the society, a characteristic common to many Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. Their elite thinking also appeared in their bourgeois approach to poverty and misery. Thus, for example, in the 1940s, the women of the Egyptian Red Crescent opened a school for nurses of »upper and middle social classes« (*al-ṭabaqat al-ijtima'iyya al-rāqiyya wa al-mutawassīṭa*)²⁸, which clearly reflected their own understanding of what it meant to be positioned at the highest ranks of society. In this, they very much resembled other charitable associations in Egypt²⁹ and other Red Cross societies worldwide.³⁰

Although one cannot find many traces in the archives, it seems that the competition with the Muslim Brotherhood was also a motor for the Egyptian Red Crescent to evolve in a rather secular direction. In fact, the Brotherhood, also had a strong social agenda from its very foundation, and pro-

vided aid to people in need in Egypt, but also in neighbouring countries, such as Palestine.³¹ In the 1930s and 1940s, Egypt was in a state of crisis, not only for economic and political reasons, but also due to the ideological questioning to which it was increasingly being subjected. As Gershoni and Jankowski, and others have shown, during this time period many social groups and intellectuals criticised the influence of the west on Egypt, and turned to other supra-national parameters, either Islamic, or Far Eastern.

Despite its rather secular orientation, the Egyptian Red Crescent remained bound to Islamic parameters, as, for instance, evidenced by the ambulances it provided for Muslim pilgrims in the Hedjaz in 1925.³² Moreover, Islamic and secular-political aspects were often mixed as the Red Crescent supported different Muslim groups in their anticolonial struggle, like the Moroccan fighters in the Rif War³³ or those who struggled against the 1935 Italian invasion in Abyssinia.³⁴ Moreover, the Egyptian Red Crescent explicitly referenced the Muslim population of Yugoslavia in its support of the latter.³⁵ In Egypt itself, the Islamic tradition also influenced the Red Crescent's activities, as the organisation set up particular activities of fundraising during Ramadan, for example.³⁶ Yet, the Egyptian Red Crescent also provided help beyond Islamic borders, for instance by sending donations to Polish refugees in Hungary during the Second World War.³⁷

Gender also played an important role in the Egyptian Red Crescent's charitable engagement, as well as that of other organisations in Egypt. First, the women's committee of the Egyptian Red Crescent was founded in 1940 as a response to

24 Zuhail Özeydin, »The Indian Muslims Red Crescent Society's Aid to the Ottoman State During the Balkan War in 1912«, *Journal of the International Society for the History of Islamic Medicine*, 2 (2003), 12–18.

25 Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ACICR), A AF, 19.2.1: Egypte Copies Correspondances envoyées, letter from the ICRC to the Egyptian Red Crescent, Geneva/1912.

26 Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–31. In fact, the country remained under strong British control until the military putsch in July 1952.

27 Uri M. Kupferschmidt, Henry Naus Bey: *Retrieving the Biography of a Belgian Industrialist in Egypt* (Brussels: Académie royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1999), 53.

28 Dar al-Wathā'iq (National Archives Cairo) (DWQ), 0075/054413, note no. 1 presented to the Administration Council for Railway, Telegraphs and Telephone of the Egyptian government, Cairo, 02.03.1938.

29 Ener, *Managing Egypt's Poor*, 123.

30 For the British Red Cross see: Rebecca Gill, *Calculating Compassion: Humanity and Relief in War, Britain 1870–1914* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2013).

31 Ghada Hashem Talhami, *Palestine in the Egyptian Press. From Al-Aḥḥram to Al-Ahali* (New York et al.: Lexington Books, 2007), 83.

32 See National Archives Cairo (Dar al-Wathā'iq, in the following DAW/Cairo), 0069-003916: jam'iyyat al-hilāl al-aḥmar al-miṣrī al-aḥliyya 1925, letter from Husseyn Mu'ayyad to the King, Jeddah/21 Mar. 1925. In his letter, Mu'ayyad complains about the Red Crescent's surgeon, Dr. Hassan, who has taken materials from the society's storage.

33 See Dirk Sasse, *Franzosen, Briten und Deutsche im Rifkrieg 1921–1926. Spekulanten und Sympathisanten, Deserteure und Hasardeure im Dienste Abdelkrims* (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), p. 73: In April 1925 Prince Omar Toussou gave 500 Pounds to the British Red Crescent Society.

34 DWQ, 0075-050566: Il-qā' al-qanābil 'ala mustaṣfiyyat al-hilāl al-aḥmar [Report on the bombing of the Red Crescent's hospitals].

35 Al-Balāgh, 29.06.1944, p. 2: »Li-mu'āna muslim al-iūghūslāfiyya. Nidā' jam'iyyat al-hilāl al-aḥmar (For the help of the Muslims of Yugoslavia. Appeal from the Red Crescent)«.

36 See for example: *Al-Ahrām*, 02.01.1940, p. 6: »Usbū' al-hilāl al-aḥmar wa al-tadhākīr al-safr bi-l- saka al-ḥadīd« (The week of the Red Crescent and Train Tickets).

37 ACICR, CR 0020, letter from ICRC-delegate Vaucher to the ICRC, Cairo/19.01.1940.

the many Arab refugees fleeing from Cyrenaica to Egypt, and was the most active group within the Red Crescent. This is even more surprising given the fact that in 1923, when the Egyptian Red Crescent sent its first statutes to the ICRC, the latter criticised the status accorded to women in the constitution of the Egyptian Red Crescent as »backward«³⁸. This was because among the four possible categories of membership – active, honorary, subscribing and donating – women were only able to fulfil the ones of subscribing and donating.³⁹ Interestingly, among the four categories established in the Arabic version – honorary (*sharaf*), deciding (*mukhasimīn*), active (*amalīn*), and participating (*mushtarikīn*), – women could occupy all positions except the active one.⁴⁰ In reality, however, the women became the most active members, to the disapproval both of the male Red Crescent members, and of the ICRC-staff in Geneva. For women in Egypt in the 1930s in 1940s, charitable engagement was a way of public activity outside of the space within which they were often restricted, i.e., their home. Indeed, next to the women's committee of the Egyptian Red Crescent, other associations, which included women also existed, like for example, the Mubarrat Muḥammad 'Ali. This association was founded in 1909 by Princess Ayn al-Hayat Aḥmad, a member of the royal family known for her philanthropic work.⁴¹ While both associations shared the elite background of their members, they differed from each other in that Mubarrat Muḥammad 'Ali was for women only. Scholars disagree on how to qualify the political dimension of these women's philanthropic engagement. While some consider them as un-emancipated and dependent on the palace, others qualify them as engaged in women's rights, and even as feminists.⁴² Though some women, such as the first and long-time president of the Red Crescent's women's committee, Nahid Sirry – wife of the pro-British politician Husayn Sirry – were indeed involved in feminist circles, other women did not have contact with feminist groups and were interested instead

in using their capacity to do something useful. Still, we would argue that by engaging with an organisation that had international connections, and by advocating for professional nursing classes to women, they »copied« contents and structures from the women's movement in Egypt⁴³.

In so far as their concrete activities were concerned, the Egyptian Red Crescent, similarly to Mubarrat Muḥammad 'Ali, provided humanitarian relief in times of emergency, such as during wars or epidemics; but they also built up medical and social services in hospitals, for example. Since Egypt lacked any comprehensive social welfare system at the time of British domination, voluntary associations played a central role in the provision of basic medical aid to poor people in need, and thus provided »major social and health services that the government was either unable or unwilling to perform (...) throughout the poorest districts of Cairo and the rural provinces.«⁴⁴

South Asia

Practises and concepts of *dana* (charitable giving), *seva* (service), and *dharma* (religious duty) have been developed in South Asia beginning in ancient times.⁴⁵ A shift in the practises of giving occurred with the establishment of British colonial power in the subcontinent. In the early 19th century, British administrators used philanthropic measures to consolidate their authority and to build and expand their state. In so doing, British officials concentrated their philanthropic initiatives primarily on »works of public utility«, which were conducted through modern rational public institutions.⁴⁶

38 ACICR, CR 0020: Croissant-Rouge Egyptien, letter from ICRC-member Desgouttes to ICRC-delegate Peter, Geneva, 29.12.1923.

39 Ibid.

40 See the text of the constitution in Arabic in DWQ, 0075-052276: Jalasa majlis al-wuzarā' bi-tārīḥ 5 Abīl 1923, no. 52: Qanūn jam'iyyat al-hilāl al-aḥmar al-miṣri al-aḥliyya (Meeting of the Council of Ministers on April 5, 1923, no. 52: Constitution of the National Society of the Egyptian Red Crescent), 5.

41 Nancy Gallagher, *Egypt's Other Wars. Epidemics and the Politics of Public Health* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 10.

42 Nancy Gallagher, »Writing Women Medical Practitioners into the History of Modern Egypt«, in *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919–1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson and Barak A. Salmoni (Cairo/New York: Cairo University Press 2005), 351–370.

43 Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and the Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

44 Cynthia Nelson, Doria Shafik, *Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 1996), 115.

45 Leona Anderson, »Generosity of Householders, Generosity of Kings: Situating Philanthropy in South Asia«, in *Philanthropy and Cultural Context: Western Philanthropy in South, East, and Southeast Asia in the 20th Century*, ed. Soma Hewa and Philo Hove (Lanham: Univ. Press of America 1997), 185–202. For a recent special issue on the theme of »Charity and Philanthropy in South Asia« from ancient to contemporary times see: *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018).

46 Carey A. Watt, »Philanthropy and Civilizing Missions in India c. 1820–1960: States, NGOs and Development«, in *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia: From Improvement to Development*, ed. Carey A. Watt and Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 275–279; Ravi Ahuja, »The Bridge-Builders: Some Notes on Railways, Pilgrimage and the British »Civilizing Mission« in Colonial India«, in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann (London: Anthem 2004), 95–116. See for an excellent overview regarding charitable giving in colonial and postcolonial South Asia: Filippo Osella, »Charity and Philanthropy in South Asia: An Introduction«, *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018), 4–34.

These works, which included building courts, police stations, jails, hospitals, wells, walls, and roads, aimed to serve collective public interest, but first and foremost the »moral and material objectives of British colonial rule«.⁴⁷ At the same time, missionaries and other non-governmental actors, such as school societies, introduced new forms of civil society organisation, fund-raising, and reform activism.⁴⁸

The encounter with British philanthropy altered indigenous charitable and associational traditions of the South Asian elite over the century. Relief efforts in times of fire, flood and famine, as well as the building of wells and rest houses, had been common before 1800, yet those initiatives of the South Asian elite must be seen in the context of religious gifting. The 19th century saw the beginning of a twofold process. First, the wealthy South Asians continued traditional religious gifting, which included large donations to shrines of deities and saints. Festivals were also sponsored. Together, the objective was to build up a social reputation and economic credit within the community. At the same time, under the influence and directives of British rule, such gifts were complemented by a more utilitarian and humanitarian nature of gift and charitable giving. To secure good and stable relationships with their rulers, and to legitimise their own status, merchants began investing in the provision of schools, colleges, hospitals and other public works.⁴⁹ Under colonialism therefore, *seva* and *dana* acquired the special characteristic of catering to two different sets of audiences: one, the community, and two, the colonial state.

In the late 19th century, South Asian (particularly Hindu) philanthropic traditions evolved into modern systems of social service through the redefinition of the »living traditions« of *seva*, *dana* and *dharma*.⁵⁰ Modern forms of social service aimed at »improving« and strengthening »community«,

»race« and »country«⁵¹, and encompassed activities in a variety of fields, such as in education, and in the curbing of epidemics. Social services were conducted by diverse voluntary bodies and individuals, for instance the Ramakrishna Mission, the Servants of India Society, the Seva Samiti of Allahabad, various Social Service Leagues, and the Theosophical Society. Gradually, health care, emergency relief, and first aid provision at large fairs also came under the ambit of service. The efforts of these organisations were largely directed towards the poor, »backward«, and marginalised people of South Asia.⁵²

A redefinition of *dana* and *seva* also took place in relief provisions for victims of natural disasters. In the late 18th and throughout the 19th century the British in India were engaged in famine relief politics,⁵³ but their efforts did not prove successful, and led to the emergence of a parallel non-state system of charitable relief.⁵⁴ The volunteer humanitarianism of middle-class members, social as well as religious South Asian organisations and actors such as the Ramakrishna Mission, the Arya Samaj and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, combined indigenous traditions of relief with British models of organised philanthropy.⁵⁵ In this way, as Georgina Brewis has convincingly argued, the concepts and practises of voluntary relief transformed significantly. Since the 1890s, humanitarian help in South Asia during famines was marked by fund-

47 Watt, »Philanthropy and Civilizing Missions in India«, 278.

48 Jana Tschurenne, »Incorporation and Differentiation: Popular Education and the Imperial Civilizing Mission in Early Nineteenth Century India«, in *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia: From Improvement to Development*, ed. Carey A. Watt and Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press 2011), 93–124.

49 Douglas E. Haynes, »From Tribute to Philanthropy: The Politics of Gift Giving in a Western Indian City«, *Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 2 (1987), 339–360.

50 Carey A. Watt, *Serving the Nation: Cultures of Service, Association, and Citizenship in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13–19; Gwilym Beckerlegge, »Swami Vivekananda and Seva: Taking »Social Service« Seriously«, in *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, ed. William Radice (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1998), 158–193; Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay, 1890–1920* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2007), chp. 7.

51 Watt, *Serving the nation*, 3; Katan Alder, *Arenas of Service and the Development of the Hindu Nationalist Subject in India* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester 2015), 58–63.

52 Watt, »Philanthropy and Civilizing Missions in India«, 279–286; Watt, *Serving the Nation*; 2011; Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989), 38, 41–46, 64, 100 and 175. For an overview of the several meanings of *seva* in the social and political contexts of colonial South Asia see: R. Srivatsan, »Concept of »Seva« and the »Sevak« in the Freedom Movement«, *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 5 (2006), 427–438.

53 Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy and the Colonial State: North India in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2001); Ravi Ahuja, »State Formation and »Famine Policy« in Early Colonial South India«, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 39, no. 4 (2002), 351–380; B. M. Bhatia, *Famines in India: A Study in Some Aspects of the Economic History of India (1860–1965)*, 2. ed. (Bombay: Asia Publishing House 1967).

54 Georgina Brewis, »»Fill Full the Mouth of Famine«: Voluntary action in famine relief in India 1896–1901«, *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2010), 8187–918, esp. 895; Lala Lajpat Rai, *A History of the Arya Samaj*, rev., exp. and ed. by Shri Ram Sharma (Bombay: Orient Longmans 1967), 129–133.

55 Brewis, »»Fill Full the Mouth of Famine«; Gwilym Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Mission* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2006); Lajpat Rai, *A History of the Arya Samaj*, 129–133.

raising, co-operation with other agencies, and the personnel service of the volunteers.⁵⁶

In the first half of the 20th century, a variety of South Asian organisations became prominent in providing humanitarian relief for victims in international crises and domestic (communal) conflicts. These included the South Asian branches of international civil society organisations, such as the Indian Red Cross, the Indian St. John Ambulance, the Salvation Army, and the Young Men's Christian Association. However, they also comprised of diverse local, national political, and religious-cultural associations, including women's groups such as the Indian National Congress (INC), the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, the Marwari Relief Society, the Bengal Ambulance Corps, and the All-India Women Conference.⁵⁷

The relief work of non-state actors and organisations was, however, not limited to the realm of the »social«. Most of them were linked in many ways with the domain of the »political«. In a colonial situation, one of the strongest political manifestations of humanitarianism was its relationship with nationalism. By fostering the production of patriotic citizens who cared for each other, for the nation, and for strangers in need, nation building efforts could claim moral authority, and political legitimacy against colonial rule.⁵⁸ As different South Asian concepts of nationalism emerged, the questions of who belonged to the (imagined) nation, and therefore, who should receive aid and support in times of crisis were contested, and partially reinforced efforts to care (exclusively) for one's own community.⁵⁹

56 Brewis, »Fill Full the Mouth of Famine«, 917f. Humanitarian relief was also required in the aftermath of cyclones and earthquakes in India.

57 Maria Framke analyses in her project these two groups of organisations, the latter being of a non-sectarian background or belonged to the Hindu tradition. However, political and religious-cultural associations that engaged in humanitarian work were also founded by other parties and religious communities. For relief activities of some of these organisations see: Harald Fischer-Tiné, »Unparalleled Opportunities: The Indian Y.M.C.A.'s Army Work Schemes for Imperial Troops During the Great War (1914-1920«, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (2018); Maria Framke, »We Must Send a Gift Worthy of India and the Congress! War and political Humanitarianism in Late Colonial South Asia«, *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 6 (2017), 1969-1998.

58 Watt, »Philanthropy and Civilizing Missions in India«, 279-292; Watt, *Serving the Nation*, chp. 6.

59 Two things, however, need to be emphasised: one, the spread of modern social service movements and humanitarian engagement did not amount to the complete disappearance of traditional forms of *seva* and gifting. While *dana* acquired new meanings, goals and forms between the 1920s and 1940s, older forms of giving existed alongside (Watt, *Serving the Nation*, chp. 3; Malavika Kasturi, »All Gifting is Sacred: The Sanatana Dharma Sabha Movement, the Reform of Dana and Civil Society in Late Colonial India«, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, no. 1 (2010),

One organisation that followed such a particularistic approach in relief work was the All-India Hindu Mahasabha (hereafter Hindu Mahasabha), the political party of the Hindu Nationalists. It was formally founded in Hardwar in 1915 with the objective of providing a political platform that would bring together different existing Hindu organisations, and thus, serve to unify Hindus. To do so, provincial Hindu Sabhas were also set up. In the first years, however, the Hindu Mahasabha remained mostly a North Indian phenomenon that worked for cow-protection, Hindu uplift, and other educational and social welfare activities amongst Hindus. With the increased communalisation of South Asian politics from the 1920s onwards, the Hindu Mahasabha not only gradually extended its political work and geographical realm, it also became increasingly involved with setting up campaigns for *shuddhi* (reconversion) and *sangathan* (the understanding of the Hindu community as an organic whole).⁶⁰ Although it never became a major political force in late colonial British India, the Hindu Mahasabha – especially after the accession of V. D. Savarkar as its president from 1937 onwards – was not only able to occupy a niche in the political sphere in the late 1930s and 1940s, it also contributed lastingly to the emergence and spread of Hindu nationalism on the South Asian subcontinent.⁶¹ The organisation was involved in the anticolonial struggle; however, the national movement was dominated by the Indian National Congress. After India's independence in 1947, the Hindu Mahasabha remained active. It became, however, increasingly marginalised from the early 1950s onwards.

Before 1947, South Asian humanitarian efforts in armed conflicts were mainly directed towards international wars. The internationally linked national and local organisations, however, were also involved in comprehensive relief work during

107-139). Second, and related to it, is the fact that although nationalist implications of humanitarianism put it in opposition to colonialism, the emergence of nation-state bound views of humanitarianism was part of broader social and political changes operating at the global level (Wolfgang U. Eckart and Philipp Osten, eds., *Schlachtschrecken – Konventionen: Das Rote Kreuz und die Erfindung der Menschlichkeit im Kriege* (Freiburg: Centaurus Verlag 2011); Heather Jones, »International or Transnational? Humanitarian Action During the First World War«, *European Review of History* 16, no. 5 (2009), 697-713; Reeves, »From Red Crosses to Golden Arches«, 63-93).

60 Richard Gordon, »The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915-1926«, *Modern Asian Studies* 9, no. 2 (1975), 145-203; Bhuwan Kumar Jha, »Militarizing the Community: Hindu Mahasabha's Initiative (1915-1940)«, *Studies in History* 29, no. 1 (2013), 119-146; Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford/New York: Berg 2001), 48-68.

61 Nandini Gondhalekar and Sanjoy Bhattacharya, »The All India Hindu Mahasabha and the End of British Rule in India, 1939-1947«, *Social Scientist* 27, no. 7-8 (1999), 48-74.

the communal violence⁶² that took place between Hindus and Muslims, especially in the 1920s and afterwards.⁶³ Community-based organisations became very active in organising help to their community members. The Hindu Mahasabha not only provided relief for Hindu victims in the aftermath of communal violence, as, for instance, in Nagpur in 1927, but, in 1934, it also declared as one of its main objectives the providing of aid to Hindu men and women in need of help after communal riots and disturbances.⁶⁴ This tradition of selective, or rather, of exclusive aid provided by community-based organisations became an important way of distributing relief in the months before, during, and after partition, not only amongst Hindus, but also amongst Muslims and Sikhs.⁶⁵ Next to its humanitarian involvement in the course of communal conflicts, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha had also gained experiences in relief work in the late colonial period during the Bengal famine (1943). In this case, it started the Bengal Provincial Mahasabha Relief Committee that aimed to provide food items and cash to famine victims. Its work was financed both by contributions from the government and private donors, and gave the organisation an opportunity to extend its political space as is evidenced by its increased membership in Bengal.⁶⁶ These cursory impressions of the Hindu Mahasabha's humanitarian engagements in the

late colonial period point to a nexus of relief, work, and politics, which continued to shape the organisation's aid during partition.

Providing Humanitarian Aid during decolonisation: Continuities and shifts in Egyptian and South Asian relief work

The Egyptian Red Crescent

Despite their openness to Western and British culture, the members of the Egyptian Red Crescent were decidedly against the British occupation, especially when it turned into violent acts, and immediately assisted the victims of these incidents.

The first incident, considered part of the decolonisation of Egypt in 1952, took place in late January 1952 in Ismailiya in the Canal Zone. The British military killed around 30, and arrested 800 Egyptian auxiliary police officers who had refused to leave the city, and were backed by the local government. Consequently, the women's committee went to the Canal Zone in order to »assist the population hit by the sad events of January«.⁶⁷ Two weeks earlier, Red Crescent secretary Mohamed Bey El-Ghatit had already asked ICRC delegate Pierre Gaillard for a meeting in Cairo in order to inform the Swiss delegate about the »violations committed by British troops against a civil Egyptian hospital in Suez«.⁶⁸ El-Ghatit requested the ICRC, and the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to transmit the Egyptian protest to all national societies. In his report to Geneva about this meeting, not only did Gaillard slightly criticise the request by drawing parallels to the Egyptian government, »which is using all means possible to alert the world's public opinion in its favour«⁶⁹, he also noted that the Red Crescent would certainly raise this topic at the Red Cross Conference in Toronto, which was scheduled for July/August of the same year. Both the Egyptian government and Gaillard in his critique followed the tendency of newly, or nearly, independent states in the era of decolonisation to »systematically contest or reject already established structures«.⁷⁰ In his response

⁶² Communal violence is violence between members of different religious communities often against the background of socio-economic and political inequalities.

⁶³ B. V. Deshpande and S. R. Ramaswamy, *Dr. Hedgewar: The Epoch Maker, A Biography* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu 1981), 95–6; T. Muhammedali, »In Service of the Nation: Relief and Reconstruction in Malabar in the Wake of the Rebellion of 1921«, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 68, no. 1 (2007), 789–805. An even earlier example of communal aid can be found in the volunteer unit set up by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in the early 1910s. This unit provided relief for Hindus after a communal riot in Calcutta. See Gwilym Beckerlegge, »The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's »Tradition of Selfless Service«, in *The Politics of Cultural Mobilization in India*, ed. John Zavos, Andrew Wyatt and Vernon M. Hewitt (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2004), 107.

⁶⁴ Gordon, »The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress«, 169; Deshpande and Ramaswamy, *Dr. Hedgewar*, 95–6; Beatriz Martinez Saavedra, *Shaping the »Community»: Hindu Nationalist Imagination in Gujarat, 1880–1950* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick 2013), 119; Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915–1930: Constructing Nation and History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 49–50.

⁶⁵ Beckerlegge, »The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's«, 115; Ian Talbot, *Freedom's Cry: The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India* (Karachi: Oxford University Press 1996), chp. 2. For an insider account of the relief activities by the Hindu Nationalist volunteer organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh see: H. V. Seshadri, *RSS: A Vision in Action* (Bangalore: Jagarana Prakashana 1988), 203 f.

⁶⁶ Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali, 1943–47* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 113–121.

⁶⁷ »(...) secourir les populations éprouvées par les tristes événements de janvier«. ACICR, B AG 121 065 001-007, Egypte 1951-1962, B AG 121 065-002: Généralités 19.02.1951-26.02.1953, press cutting »La Bourse Égyptienne«, 25.05.1952 : »La Mort de Loutifa Hanem El-Abd«.

⁶⁸ ACICR, B AG 121 065 001-007, Egypte 1951-1962, B AG 202 065-001: Généralités, note from Gaillard to the ICRC, Cairo/11.1.1952.

⁶⁹ »(...) qui cherche par tous les moyens à alerter l'opinion publique mondiale en sa faveur«. ACICR, B AG 121 065 001-007, Egypte 1951-1962, B AG 202 065-001: Généralités, note from Gaillard to the ICRC, Cairo/11.01.1952. As examples, Gaillard cited recent requests from the Egyptian government to the World Health Organisation, the Bureau of International Telecommunications, and diverse governments and universities.

⁷⁰ Marcel Boisard, *L'Humanisme de l'Islam* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), 374: although he recognises the postcolonial

to El-Ghatit, which was documented in the report, Gaillard suggests that the Egyptian government directly address the British government, as had been the practise before.

The next incident in the process of decolonisation with which the Egyptian Red Crescent got heavily involved was the Suez war, which in Arabic was entitled »The Tripartite Aggression (*al-ʿudwān al-thalātha*)«. The association assisted the victims of the aerial bombings by Israel, France, and Great Britain by bringing medicine, food, and clothing to the Canal Zone.

At first, the British Government denied the Egyptian Red Crescent access to the Canal Zone, because it understood the organisation as not being neutral. Instead, the British requested an ICRC team to provide humanitarian help, and even preferred the International Committee to the British Red Cross team.⁷¹ This example shows that the neutrality of medical units, as proclaimed by the Geneva Conventions, was not automatically accepted by belligerent parties.⁷² The Egyptian Red Crescent used this incident to sharply criticise British behaviour. As reported by the state-owned newspaper *Al-Ahrām* on 19 November 1956, the Egyptian Red Crescent sent a protest to the ICRC in Geneva. Furthermore, Jinane al-Shawarbi, a member of the Egyptian Red Crescent Committee in Cairo, convened a press conference where she criticised the boycott of the British.⁷³ In the course of the conflict, the issue of neutrality remained an important question. Thus, in an article from 28 November 1956, the newspaper *Ākhir Sāʿa* opposed the Red Cross's neutrality (under which it subsumed the Egyptian Red Crescent) and criticized that Britain and France »violate the Red Cross message« (*tukhāraqa al-risāla al-ṣalīb al-*

states' rights and legitimacy to critically consider international norms, »les entités politique récemment associés au processus d'élaboration juridique ne devraient pas trouver prétexte à rejeter ou à contester systématiquement les structures en place«.

⁷¹ TNA, FO 371/1118906, JE 1094/90, letter from F.M. Murray A.F.H.O. to Foreign Office, 12.11.1956.

⁷² In fact, neutrality also played a prominent role in Egypt's foreign policy under Nasser who moved towards an approach of »positive neutrality« under the influence of the Non-Aligned Movement. This means that leaders of former colonies would look to the Soviet Bloc as well as to the West for aid in pursuing state policies. See Adeed Dawisha, »Egypt«, in *The Cold War and the Middle East*, ed. Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27–47, 33, 35. In the current state of Möller's project it is not clear to which extent this political strategy influenced the humanitarian principle of neutrality.

⁷³ *Al-Ahram*, 19.11.1956, 4: »Miṣr taḥtaj ludi al-ṣalīb al-aḥmar ʿala taʿṭil baʿtha al-hilāl al-aḥmar wa manaʿ al-igh-dhiyya ʿan aḥālī būr saʿīd (Egypt protests to the Red Cross on the obstruction of the Red Crescent mission, and the prevention of food for (and the prevention of food reaching?) the people of Port Said)«.

aḥmar).⁷⁴ The Egyptian stance was supported by the Jordanian Red Crescent, which condemned the »inhuman acts by two civilised countries« which »violate and defeat the high ((50)) [sic!] principles and human ideals the Red Cross and the Red Crescent stand for throughout the civilised world«.⁷⁵ Besides Arab and Muslim organisations, the Egyptian Red Crescent received much help and many declarations of solidarity from all over the world⁷⁶, which corresponded to the wave of global solidarity for the Egyptian people in general.⁷⁷

After Egypt's complete independence from Great Britain, the Egyptian Red Crescent's relationship with the government, which had already been close, became even closer. On the one hand the government displayed an interest in the organisation, and on the other, it also extended its control. The Egyptian Red Crescent shared this fate with other civil society associations, which slowly came under the government's authoritarian influence. In addition to following the formal directives of changing of the organisation's name from »Society Faruq I. Egyptian Red Crescent« into »Egyptian Red Crescent«, and abstaining from using the titles inherited from Ottoman times (like bey and pasha⁷⁸), the Red Crescent also had to form a »cleansing committee« (*comité d'épuration*) like all other governmental and para-governmental organisations.⁷⁹ In fact, a law of 1956 brought all private welfare organisations under government control.⁸⁰ As Nancy Gallagher rightly remarks, both the Mubarrat Muḥammad ʿAli and the Egyptian Red Crescent, were suspect to the new government because of their close association with the palace and the wealthy elite.⁸¹ Yet, the new measures concerned charitable organisations in general. And, for example, while one positive aspect was that women found more opportunities in government-sponsored higher education, and in certain professions, female volunteers suddenly lost their central occupation as hospitals, and other

⁷⁴ *Ākhir Sāʿa*, 28.11.1956, 2: »Qīṣat al-hilāl wa al-ṣalīb al-aḥmar (A Story from the Red Crescent and the Red Cross)«.

⁷⁵ FRCRCS, A 1023 Box 2: 22/1/2: »Egypte 1956-1958«, telegraph from the Jordanian Red Crescent to the League, 19.11.1956.

⁷⁶ Möller, »The Suez Crisis of 1956«, 136–153.

⁷⁷ Matthieu Rey, »Fighting Colonialism« Versus »Non-Alignment«: Two Arab Points of View in the Bandung Conference«, in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi-Bandung-Belgrade*, ed. Nataša Mišković, Harald Fischer-Tiné and Nada Boškowska (London/New York: Routledge, 2014), 163–183.

⁷⁸ ACICR B AG 121 065/002, »Note«, September 1952.

⁷⁹ ACICR, B AG 121 065 001-007, Egypte 1951-1962, B AG 121 065-002: Généralités 19.02.1951-26.02.1953, letter from de Angeli to the ICRC, 20.10.1952; see also Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza. Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 8–9.

⁸⁰ Gallagher, *Egypt's Other Wars*, 171.

⁸¹ Ibid.

charitable services came under governmental administration.⁸²

According to the archives, the cleansing committee did not bring about major changes in the organisation's constitution. Only a few new people were introduced, like Dr. Yūssif S. Raf'at, an official at the Ministry of Hygiene, and, simultaneously, at the ERC hospital in Cairo, i.e., someone who was close to the government, but not part of the government, as was the case later on. Indeed, although the 1952 revolution implied the closer attachment of the Egyptian Red Crescent to the government, a literal fusion between both sides would only occur in 1957 when Hussein Mohamed Asfahani, the under-secretary of state at the Ministry of Social Affairs, would take over the presidency of the organisation.

This corresponds to the findings of Beth Baron who states that although »the 1950s showed a tightening of state control, continuing the pattern of characteristic of earlier years (...), this did not immediately mean a complete loss of autonomy.«⁸³ Indeed, the Egyptian Red Crescent hospital and other facilities were later also nationalised, yet because of the organisation's link with the International Committee of the Red Cross, it was able to function with little government control.⁸⁴

Furthermore, the Egyptian Red Crescent was also able to exert certain influence on the Egyptian government.⁸⁵ Already during the Israel-Palestine-War of 1948, two women of the Egyptian Red Crescent, together with two female members of another philanthropic association, the Mubarrat Muḥammad 'Ali, had participated in a national council for Palestinian refugees set up by the Ministry of Social Affairs.⁸⁶ Given that these women had practical experience in dealing with refugees in the camps set up for their purposes and brought this experience into the council, it seems that they influenced the humanitarian practises of the latter.

Nonetheless, the Egyptian Red Crescent clearly followed the government's agenda as far as its regional expansion ambitions were concerned. At first, the new Egyptian government's »search for

a regional role«⁸⁷ only involved Sudan. As James Jankowski has put it, the new Egyptian regime after the coup of 1952 was primarily preoccupied with domestic affairs, and the only exception was »the termination of the remnants of British positions in the Nile Valley«, which included Sudan.⁸⁸ Of the two preoccupations, British withdrawal from the region and the status of Sudan, Egypt decided to solve the latter first – although for the regime itself Sudan did not have the centrality it had had in Egyptian politics up to 1952.⁸⁹ Nasser has been quoted as saying that he did not fear an independent Sudan, but a Sudan occupied by the British.⁹⁰ Only four months after the military putsch, the Egyptian Red Crescent sent a delegation to Khartoum in November 1952 in order to create two local branches of its society there. Interestingly, the delegation was only composed of women, which might be because it appeared less »military« and power-oriented this way. The Egyptian media immediately linked the creation of these two branches to the political dimension of Egyptian-Sudanese relations. An article from 25 November 1952, the *Journal d'Égypte*, for example, underlined that the women led delegation had contributed to the pacification of the Sudanese conflict by cooperating with the two competing political leaders of Sudan, 'Abd-el Raḥman al-Mahdi, the posthumous son of the leader of the revolt against the Anglo-Egyptian occupation in 1898, and 'Ali al-Mirghani.⁹¹ Another article from *Progrès Égyptien* pointed to the fact that the delegation had been sent just after the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty.⁹² Furthermore, the (post-) colonial implication of this question arose because the British Red Cross itself maintained branches in Sudan,⁹³ and different branches of the Red Cross Movement continued to be concerned with the situation in Sudan after its formal independence in February 1953.⁹⁴ Indeed, the country was still in a period of transition, »in attitudes as well as in political and constitutional development«⁹⁵. Both

⁸² Gallagher, *Egypt's Other Wars*, 171.

⁸³ Beth Baron, »Women's Social Welfare Organisations, Egypt«, in *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East: Two Hundred Years of History*, ed. Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flakerud (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2005), 98.

⁸⁴ Gallagher, *Egypt's Other Wars*, 171.

⁸⁵ See for a similar argumentation in regard to Red Cross work in Russia during the First World War: Kimberly A. Lowe, »Humanitarianism and National Sovereignty: Red Cross Intervention on Behalf of Political Prisoners in Soviet Russia, 1921–3«, *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 4 (2014), 652–674.

⁸⁶ See the proceedings of the meetings of this Higher committee for the affairs of Palestinian migrants (al-majlis al-'āly li-shu'ūn al-muhājirīn al-falaṣṭīnīn) in DWQ, 4029-000592.

⁸⁷ James Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism and the United Arab Republic* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 41.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Article in *Journal d'Égypte* from 25 November 1952, kept at ACICR, B AG 121.065-002.

⁹² See Article in *Journal Progrès Égyptien* from 14 December 1952, kept at ACICR B AG 121.065-002.

⁹³ ACICR, B AG 121 065-003, »Aide-mémoire« of Gaillard, 26.03.1953.

⁹⁴ Egypt and Great Britain had agreed on Sudan's independence. See Laura James, *Nasser at War. Arab Images of the Enemy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 4. As James remarks, after this agreement the principal focus of resentment between Egypt and Great Britain became the Suez Canal.

⁹⁵ M.W. Daly, *Imperial Sudan. The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium 1934-1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 352.

the British Red Cross and the Egyptian Red Crescent continued to claim Sudan as their field of activity,⁹⁶ and only stopped once the Sudanese Red Crescent was founded in 1956.

The Hindu Mahasabha

In 1947, India's fight against colonial rule ended with the independence of British India. The two independent nation-states, Pakistan and India, came into being albeit not without large-scale violence that led to the death of up to one million people; approximately 12 million people were displaced.⁹⁷ Since the summer of 1946, British India had repeatedly witnessed serious incidents of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims; Sikhs were also involved in violence in the Punjab. After the so-called »Great Calcutta Killings« in August 1946, where more than 4,000 people died, the violence spread throughout British India. Different organisations, including the All India Hindu Mahasabha, quickly took up the work of aiding wounded victims, and provided relief for those displaced refugees belonging to Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities. After the Calcutta riots, and in the wake of the Noakhali and Trippera violence, the party initially concentrated its relief work for Hindus in Bengal. There, it provided material relief, such as food, cloths and blankets, and gave medical assistance to Hindu victims, and also invested itself in the long-term rehabilitation of the refugees by supplying tools and materials for their professions, and by supporting educational institutions.⁹⁸ In the months before, during, and after partition, however, the Hindu Mahasabha and its provincial and local branches extended their relief work, and granted similar assistance in North and West India.⁹⁹ They set up refugee camps

and canteens, but also ran an employment service for Hindu refugees.¹⁰⁰

In order to finance its activities, the Hindu Mahasabha opened relief funds and appealed repeatedly to Hindus all over »India« to donate generously for the Hindu victims.¹⁰¹ Their calls were answered by donors from all over the subcontinent, and also by Hindu diaspora communities living in East Africa.¹⁰² In their letters to the party, donors often adopted the wording used by the aid organisers, which described the aid recipients as »brethren and sisters«, a phrase that strongly pointed to the asserted commonality between them by emphasising their shared Hindu identity.¹⁰³ The exclusive circle of both donors and recipients of the aid, in this case determined by a religious identity of being Hindu, though independent of any caste, class, or creed, was informed by the Hindu Mahasabha's political ideas of *Akhand Bharat* – an irredentist concept of »undivided land of Hindus« and *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu nation).¹⁰⁴ Both ideas entailed very strong anti-Muslim feelings, which were shared, although often in less vocal terms, by many donors. The Hindu Mahasabha's aid provision was aimed at a group of victims who were defined by the religious identity of being Hindu, and was financed by donors who mostly, though not exclusively, shared this identity. As part of their broader relief programme, the organisation also set up units that were assigned the task of protecting Hindu victims and refugees, although

96 Still in April 1953, Lady Limerick of the British Red Cross sent a letter to Duchosal from the ICRC, stating it as »out of order for a second National Society to establish a branch where a branch of another National Society already exists.« ACICR, B AG 121.065-003, letter from Lady Limerick to Duchosal, London/13.04.1953.

97 Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven/ London: Yale University Press 2008); Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009); Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition. Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007).

98 Without author, *Short Report of Hindu Mahasabha Relief Activities during »Calcutta Killings« and »Noakhali Carnage«* (Calcutta: Noakhali Rescue, Relief and Rehabilitation Committee without date).

99 Yasmin Khan, »The Arrival Impact of Partition Refugees in Uttar Pradesh, 1947-52«, *Contemporary South Asia* 12, no. 4 (2003), 516-518; Namrata R. Ganneri, »The Hindu Mahasabha in Bombay (1923-1947)«, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 75 (2014), 779; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library [NMML], Manuscripts, Hindu Mahasabha Papers [HMS Papers], Subject Files, File C-167, »Press article draft, 22.09.1947«. Furthermore, first insights into the relief work of non-state organisations during the partition can

be found in: Catherine Rey-Schyr, »The ICRC's Activities on the Indian Subcontinent Following Partition (1947-1949)«, *International Review of the Red Cross* 323 (1998), 267-291; Ian Talbot, *Divided Cities: Partition and its Aftermath in Lahore and Amritsar 1947-1957* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56-58 and 168-176; Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 156-157.

100 See for instance: NMML, Manuscripts, HMS Papers, Subject Files, File C-167, »Press article draft, 22.09.1947«; NMML, Manuscripts, HMS Papers, Subject Files, File C-168, »Letter by Frontier Hindu-Sikh Relief Committee to S. P. Mookerjee, 14.07.1947« and »Letter by Hindu Sabha Ambala Cantt., 04.05.1947«. For the employment question see: NMML, Manuscripts, HMS Papers, Subject Files, File C-167.

101 See for instance: NMML, Manuscripts, HMS Papers, Subject Files, File C-110, File C-136, File 136A, File C-166 and File C-150, »Letter by Ashutosh Lahiry, undated«.

102 See letters in: NMML, Manuscripts, HMS Papers, Subject Files, File C-110 and File C-136A; NMML, Manuscripts, SPM Papers, II. - IV. Instalments, 2. Subject Files, File 143, File 150 and File 152; NMML, Manuscripts, SPM Papers, II.-IV. Instalment, 2. Subject Files, File 152, »Letter by V. K. Arya to S. P. Mookerjee, 18.11.1946«.

103 See for instance: NMML, Manuscripts, Shyama Prashad Mookerjee Papers [SPM Papers], II.-IV. Instalment, 2. Subject Files, File 152, »Letter by President of Arya Samaj Birla Lines to S. P. Mookerjee, 18.11.1946« and »Letter by P.C. Mehta to S. P. Mookerjee, 23.11.1946«; NMML, Manuscripts, HMS Papers, Subject Files, File C-110, »Letter by S. K. Datta Choudhury to K. I. Bhattacharya, 18.11.1946«.

104 Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 42.

it seems likely that these units were involved in instigating violence and attacking Muslims during disturbances.¹⁰⁵ The particularistic approach to its aid, which had marked its relief practises in the last decades of British colonialism thus became reinforced as a result of the heightening communal crises in the wake of decolonisation. Yet, by organising relief for Hindus – independent of their creed, class or caste – the Hindu Mahasabha continued to work with an universalistic idea of a Hindu community that comprised people of different social, economic, linguistic, ethnic, regional, religious and caste backgrounds.¹⁰⁶

The scale and scope of the humanitarian crisis during partition, and the transition from being a colony to two postcolonial nation-states, however, required that the Hindu Mahasabha rethink, and possibly modify, its formerly established aid practises. Thus, a shift in its attitude becomes visible when attention is turned to the question of its co-operation with other local, regional, and international relief organisations, and with the new postcolonial government. As previously described, the Hindu Mahasabha had provided aid during the Bengal famine in 1943 and 1944. Initially, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the acting president of the Hindu Mahasabha, had established the Bengal Relief Committee to which different organisations and influential people were invited. Soon, however, both individual donors and party members requested an exclusive aid distribution programme through the Hindu Mahasabha. This request led to the formation of the Bengal Provincial Mahasabha Relief Committee, which seemingly severed cooperative efforts in relief provisions in Bengal.¹⁰⁷

In September 1947, however, in the midst of the partition crises, the Hindu Mahasabha wrote to the United Council for Relief offering its full assistance for the latter's refugee work.¹⁰⁸ The United Council for Relief, led by the former vicereine, Lady Edwina Mountbatten, and supported by the postcolonial Indian government, was a committee that brought together various non-state relief or-

ganisations with the aim of providing coordinated and joint aid, thereby avoiding overlaps and any duplication of effort.¹⁰⁹ The offer of the Hindu Mahasabha points to the organisation's wish to become integrated in the national framework of aid. Because the letter also contains references to the party's aid work, and the appreciation received for it, it reveals the Hindu Mahasabha's endeavours to be acknowledged as an equally relevant humanitarian, and political player. This acknowledgement by the wider public, and also the concomitant approval by the Indian National Congress-led-government, was important for the party especially as Hindu Nationalist relief was often felt to be ignored, or was depicted as insignificant.¹¹⁰

During the late colonial period, the Indian National Congress had been the main political organisation involved in the anti-colonial struggle against Great Britain. At the same time, the Congress and certain groups under its organisational umbrella, as well as several of its members, became very active in providing humanitarian relief in conflicts such as World War One, the Spanish Civil War, the Second Chinese-Japanese War, and World War Two.¹¹¹ As the Indian National Congress was first part of the interim government in 1946, and later formed the government after independence, it turned from a non-state actor into a state actor of aid provision. Still, several of its members continued as volunteers in a non-official capacity, and remained involved in humanitarian work during partition. Thus, Congress was involved in official and non-official relief initiatives, and emerged as one of the Hindu Mahasabha's competitors in aid provision. As both organisations were (partly) driven by political motives in their relief work, their humanitarian competition overlapped with their rivalry in politics. The electoral success of the Indian National Congress, and its alternative secular vision of the Indian nation, which became the state's narrative under the premiership of Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-1963), stood in stark contrast to the nationalism concept of the Hindu Mahasabha and to its political power in postcolonial India. Hence, whether the strategic deliberations of the Hindu Mahasabha's relief work proved successful for the political career of the party cannot be fully ascertained. Given its rather marginal existence in the 1950s, it seems that its humanitarian endeavours did not pay off well politically. Yet, when we take into account other Hindu National-

105 Gondhalekar and Bhattacharya, »The All India Hindu Mahasabha«, 64.

106 The Hindu Mahasabha's comprehensive conception of a »Hindu public« comprising different castes, Dalits, converts, but also Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, was not shared by all Hindu sections. As Malavika Kasturi has recently argued, orthodox Hindus and monastic orders advocated a rather confined circle of receivers that would benefit from philanthropy based on different understandings of the Hindu socio-religious and political community. See, Malavika Kasturi, »Gurus and Gifting: Dana, the Math Reform Campaign, and Competing Visions of Hindu Sangathan in Twentieth Century India«, *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018), 99-131.

107 Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal*, 113 f.

108 NMML, Manuscripts, HMS Papers, Subject Files, File C-168, »Letter by the Secretary of the Central Hindu Reclamation Board to United Council for Relief, 25.09.1947«.

109 Donald Ebright, *Free India: The First Five Years. An Account of the 1947 Riots, Refugees, Relief and Rehabilitation* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1954), 58-60 and 67-68.

110 NMML, Manuscripts, HMS Papers, Subject Files, File C-168, »Letter by the Secretary of the Central Hindu Reclamation Board to United Council for Relief, 25.09.1947«; »Hindu Sahayata Samiti's Service to Refugees«, *The Organiser*, 14.08.1947, 15.

111 See for instance Framke, »We must send a gift«.

ist relief efforts, for instance, the one provided by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Hindu Sahatya Samiti, it seems that their overall work contributed to an increased popularity of Hindu nationalist organisations and their vision of a Hindu nation in independent India.¹¹²

Conclusion

As our case studies have shown, non-western humanitarian action formed an important part of humanitarian history in the 19th and 20th centuries. The analysis of the chosen Egyptian and South Asian humanitarian organisations reveals continuities and shifts in their relief ideas and practises in the process of decolonisation. Older forms of charitable giving remained important, yet at the same time changes occurred in the organisation's relationship with other humanitarian actors and the state. Thus, most of the personnel that had already worked for the Egyptian Red Crescent before 1952 remained active in the society after the country's complete independence. However, the organisation became more closely bound to the Egyptian government, following the latter's expansionist agenda in engaging in Sudan, for example. Against the background of massive partition violence during decolonisation, the Hindu Mahasabha expanded its relief work. Although it continued to favour a selective mode of aid provision for Hindu victims, the competition with the Indian National Congress in humanitarian and political terms seems to have influenced its efforts to cooperate with other humanitarian actors. To be able to show its support for the newly emerged Indian nation, and thus to extend its political power, required both the recognition of its humanitarian work, and its integration in the national framework of aid.

Thus, our case studies point to the close interconnectedness of humanitarianism and governance. For the Western context, Daniel Laqua and others have convincingly argued that humanitarianism can be a form of politics, in which the actors' views on domestic politics and the international order decisively influenced their humanitarian work.¹¹³ In a similar sense, Barnett and Stein argue that humanitarianism is »organized and part

of governance«.¹¹⁴ The connection of humanitarianism with governance is thereby not limited to its involvement in state structures, but is also linked to the impetus to create permanent institutions as a means to »produce order, prosperity and security«.¹¹⁵ In the tumultuous period of decolonisation, this production of order has been claimed by diverse agencies, and our comparative approach shows the malleability of the idea of humanitarianism, as non-Western branches of international organisations could use it as well as political parties.

To conclude, we consider the analysis of Egyptian and South Asian humanitarian organisations very useful to deal with the question of non-western humanitarianism in the period of independence. We hope that other scholars will engage in the debate so that a more complete understanding will emerge of the role that humanitarianism played in the political and social processes of transformation during decolonisation.

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- 112** Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics. 1925 to the 1990s* (London: Hurst & Company, 1993), 75–76; Jean A. Curran, »The RSS: Militant Hinduism«, *Far Eastern Survey* 19, no. 10 (1950), 93–94; Beckerlegge, »The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s«, 115; Clemens Six, *Secularism, Decolonisation, and the Cold War in South and Southeast Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 101–103.
- 113** Daniel Laqua, »Inside the Humanitarian Cloud: Causes and Motivations to Help Friends and Strangers«, *Journal of Modern European History* 12, no. 2 (2014), 177. And see the contributions in the special issue »Ideas, Practices and Histories of Humanitarianism«, *Journal of Modern European History* 12, no. 2 (2014).
- 114** Michael Barnett and Janice Stein, »Introduction: The Secularization and Sanctification of Humanitarianism«, in *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism*, ed. Michael Barnett and Janice Stein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.
- 115** Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin, »Introduction: Government and Humanity«, in *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care*, ed. Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.

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